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Viewing cable 09DJIBOUTI113, DJIBOUTI APPROVES BLACKWATER FOR COMMERCIAL COUNTER-PIRACY

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09DJIBOUTI113**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DJIBOUTI113	2009-02-12 16:01	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Djibouti

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nytimes.com>

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000113

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHSA](#) [MOPS](#) [BEXP](#) [DJ](#) [SO](#) [XA](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI APPROVES BLACKWATER FOR COMMERCIAL COUNTER-PIRACY OPERATIONS

REF: a) LONDON 62 (NOTAL)

1. (C) SUMMARY. U.S. security firm, Blackwater Worldwide (BW), has received permission from the Government of Djibouti to operate an armed ship from the port of Djibouti, to protect commercial shipping from pirates off the coast of Somalia. Blackwater's U.S.-flagged ship is expected to arrive in early March, and will have a crew of 33 AmCits, including three 6-man armed teams who will operate in continuous shifts. The Djiboutian Navy will secure Blackwater's weapons (i.e., .50-caliber machine guns) while ashore in Djibouti. Blackwater does not intend to take any pirates into custody, but will use lethal force against pirates if necessary; it is developing an SOP that is currently under legal review and will be shared with the USG. Blackwater's counter-piracy operation does not have any clients yet, but Blackwater expects business to develop following a public launch in Djibouti in March with GODJ officials. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) On Feb. 8, ex-FSO Robert Emmett Downey, Blackwater Worldwide's Development Manager for Africa, provided the following update to Amb. Swan, DCM, and Bob Patterson (TDY from Embassy Nairobi):

a) Hassan Said Khaireh--triple-hatted as Djibouti's national security advisor, head of the security/intelligence service, and director of President Guelleh's Military Office--has given BW permission to operate its armed ship in Djibouti. BW met with Hassan Said on Feb. 7, following an earlier meeting in WashDC between BW's CEO Erik Prince and Cofer Black with Djiboutian Amb. to the U.S. Robleh Olhaye. This is the only such arrangement so far that BW has made with a host government in the region, but BW will likely engage Oman and Kenya in the future (e.g., in the event of a mechanical malfunction, the only facilities capable of repairing BW's ship are located in Mombasa.) Within the USG, BW has briefed AFRICOM, CENTCOM, and Embassy Nairobi officials.

b) BW's ship is the 'McArthur,' a U.S.-flagged 183-foot ex-NOAA vessel. While it has landing space for two helicopters, it will have an unarmed UAV, but no helicopters (which BW considers too expensive). The ship will be armed with .50-caliber machine guns, and is able to protect a 3-ship convoy. The Djiboutian Navy will secure BW's weapons, once ashore, and will inspect BW's weapons lockers. According to Downey, BW's business concept--having its armed ship escort other ships requiring protection--is consistent with recent IMO/industry recommendations discouraging the carriage of firearms, or the presence of embarked armed security teams, aboard commercial ships themselves (e.g., see reftel, on the 85th session of the IMO Maritime Safety Committee). The 'McArthur' will dock in Djibouti for 36-72 hours every 30 days, to replenish its stores. According to Downey, BW is the only such firm with its own ship.

c) All personnel on BW's ship will be U.S. citizens: comprising 15 crew and 18 armed security personnel (three 6-man teams who will operate in continuous 8-hour shifts). These 33 "operators" will rotate every 60 days. For medical contingencies, BW has arranged--through its local agent in Djibouti, Inchcape (London-based international shipper with numerous business activities in Djibouti)--access to Bouffard, the French military hospital in Djibouti. The 'McArthur' will arrive in Djibouti in early March, after transitting Gibraltar and Acaba, Jordan. BW CEO Erik Prince plans to travel to DJ for its public launch.

d) Downey underscored BW's emphasis on compliance with U.S. laws, including defense trade controls: BW has a VP for export compliance, and depends on the USG (DOD) for contracts. BW's ship, the 'McArthur', will have video cameras to record BW counter-piracy activities.

e) BW has no intention of taking any pirates into custody. While the French have previously put pirates ashore in Puntland, Downey said BW had no plans to do so, either in Somalia or Kenya (noting that Kenya's bilateral PUC agreements with the USG and HMG were government-to-government). BW will share its SOP with Embassies Djibouti and Nairobi once approved; SOP is currently under legal review, as there is "no precedent for a paramilitary operation in a purely commercial environment." While asserting that international maritime law allows the use of lethal force against pirates, BW

DJIBOUTI 00000113 002 OF 002

also recognizes the need to respect international humanitarian obligations. Of concern, for example, is whether BW would be responsible for assisting injured pirates, if doing so endangered

BW's ability to protect its client(s).

f) BW's local agent in Djibouti is Inchcape. Bruno Pardigon, general manager of the newly formed "Djibouti Maritime Security Services" (DMSS), will provide BW with a license, following completion of an MOU with DMSS. Downey was unsure whether DMSS was a parastatal or a quasi-government agency of the GODJ. [COMMENT: Pardigon is favorably known to the Embassy as a French-Djiboutian businessman and marine conservationist who runs a diving operation in Djibouti.] While Downey will remain in Djibouti until March 2009, BW has no plans now to establish an office in Djibouti.

g) While protection is estimated to cost less than \$200,000 per trip, BW's Djibouti operation has no contracts yet for clients. Downey commented that the shipping industry may assess that piracy is declining: only 3 ships were pirated in January 2009; there are at least 4 foreign naval vessels currently docked in Djibouti conducting counter-piracy operations; and the EU's Operation Atalanta is providing military escort of ships.

13. (U) COMMENT. Djibouti's decision to permit Blackwater to begin counter-piracy operations follows ongoing GODJ efforts aimed at addressing the piracy threat. Djibouti recently hosted an IMO conference on Somali piracy that, inter alia, recommended Djibouti serve as a center for maritime training. Numerous foreign military counter-piracy operations are based in Djibouti--involving units from Spain, France, the UK, the Netherlands, and other EU members. Japan (septel) and Korea are also considering military deployments to Djibouti to support counter-piracy efforts. Djibouti is a founding member of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and has offered to host the group's planned Counter-Piracy Coordination Cell.

14. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. Blackwater's presence in Djibouti would make it one of the largest U.S. businesses operating in the country. As the host of the only U.S. military base in Africa, as well as a country with extensive commercial port facilities, Djibouti has a commercial interest in supporting foreign investors, including U.S. contractors. Blackwater executives seek to involve both Djiboutian and USG principals in a high-profile March 2009 launch; Post would appreciate Department's guidance on the appropriate level of engagement with Blackwater, while also fulfilling the USG's commercial advocacy responsibilities to support U.S. firms. END COMMENT.
SWAN